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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains a collection of essays that were written by teenage mothers participating in a writing project in the Rochester City School District and who share their feelings about themselves and their pregnancies. Their writings deal with parenthood at an early age and all of the repercussions that follow such a choice. The booklet also contains a brief overview of the Young Mothers Program, a program providing pregnant and parenting teenagers with the opportunity to continue or complete their education in a safe school setting with supportive care. (GLR)

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You don't know me, and I don't know you. My face is only a face in a crowd. My feelings st: my feelings. My fa shows anger, and I ang or am hiding n feelings? If you rea knew me, you wou like me, but sinc nobody know only a face in a crowd.

YOU DON'T KNOW ME

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YOU DON'T KNOW ME is the result of a writing project with Dale Davis with the students of Roberta Liebhaber and Eleanor Hulme, The Young Mothers Program, Rochester City School District. The writing project was administered by Karin Wieder, Project U.N.I.Q.U.E. and Rochester City School District's Artist-In-Residence Program.

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YOU DON'T KNOW ME

The Young Mothers Program
Rochester City School District

Dale Davis, Writer-In-Residence

EDUCATION AND CULTURE PROJECT
The New York State Literary Center,
Young Mothers Program,
Project U.N.I.Q.U.E. and
Rochester City School District's
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The media has recently highlighted the rise in teen pregnancies and the ways in which these pregnancies strain the social system. This writing project was designed to meet the needs of young women who face the problems of bearing and raising a child, often without the support of parents or the baby's father. This writing project with Dale Davis gave teenage mothers, the students of The Young Mothers Program, a forum to express their views and can be used as a teaching tool for the community, to prevent this issue from growing into a larger societal problem.

With the help of Dale Davis, we conducted an eight session workshop in our English classes. The students ranged from seniors to Special Education students. Our intention was to diminish the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy by showing that when these students are given an opportunity for expression, they are anxious to speak. With support from Karin Wieder, Maurice Bell and principal Mary Ann Hayes, the project has been a success.

In Dale Davis' workshops, the students were motivated to produce their own book through essays and poetry. There is no book like this available. The students kept portfolios which were used for writing, editing and peer and individual performance assessment.

Most of the students were wary in the beginning, but as time went on they became more comfortable with the atmosphere of a workshop setting and their own ability to write. At times they were amazed by some of the things they were able to put down on paper to describe their own feelings about pregnancy, motherhood and family.

Dale Davis' workshop, done in collaboration with myself and Eleanor Hulme, Young Mothers Program English teachers, offered a wonderful opportunity for the young women to recognize their potential. Too often our students short change themselves; they don't realize their own gifts or strengths. As for the staff, this project allowed us to work with the students in an individualized and personalized setting. It provided an opportunity for students and staff to come together and realize the potential of these young women. The students have learned to see literature not as a threat but as an important way to express their own lives.

We hope this publication will provide teenagers and adults throughout the City of Rochester and the County of Monroe with an important resource. This publication deals with parenthood at an early age and all of the repercussions that follow such a choice.

When subjects such as this are dealt with by having students as role models speak to their peers, the message becomes somewhat more insightful and believable. We need to give teenager mothers a forum to speak, this year and hopefully next year.

It is difficult for people not involved with these students to realize their lives. It is easier to write them off as a group of rebellious, at risk students. It should be, and this is our intention in this book, easier to look upon them with concern for the future, for their future is ours. These young women are not nameless nor faceless, and therefore their babies and they themselves should have the same chance for a decent beginning and life as any child on America's streets.

ROBERTA LIEBHABER

Since its beginning, over twenty years ago, The Young Mothers Program has provided pregnant and parenting teenagers with the opportunity to continue or complete their education in a safe school setting, with additional support to assist them in dealing with their individual needs. A professional staff, most of whom have been involved with the program for many years, has assisted these students in a variety of ways, teaching, counseling, caring, with a genuine concern that each student who comes into the program will be provided for in the most appropriate way.

It has been our feeling that the young women in this program have been served well, benefiting from the small school setting and the staff's sincere desire to provide the best possible education for each and every student.

ELEANOR HULME

YOU DON'T KNOW ME consists of the feelings of teenage mothers expressing themselves through writing. With this book we hope to change the negative views society has of us.

With the guidance of Dale Davis and Eleanor Hulme and Roberta Liebhaber, we wrote for this book. As young mothers, we face various stereotypes and prejudices. Hopefully *YOU DON'T KNOW ME* will provide more understanding and awareness of us.

I hope everyone enjoys reading this book as much as we enjoyed writing it.

GRACE PHILLIPS

Something I really love in my heart is my son.

My son
is
life itself.

He came out of me. He has one of the most beautiful smiles. Tyshon is two and a half months old. He loves to be around me. He loves to laugh.

YANUK S. ANTHONY

What I love is myself, my baby, my baby's father, my mother, my family. I want to be someone who makes a lot of money. I want to be able to give my child everything he/she needs and wants. I want to marry my child's father. He means a lot to me. I love him.

I like to read. I like V.C. Andrews, Terry McMillan, Walter Dean Myers, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston.

I remember moving to Hawaii. I couldn't wait to get on the big 747. I slept most of the way. When I awoke I was told we were an hour away from the airport. When we landed I ran to my daddy and gave him a big hug and a big kiss. The next thing about Hawaii I remember is waking up to the sound of rain against my window. I went outside and watched a rainbow for hours. I saw lily pads in Hawaii, too. The lily pads were big enough to hold me and my dad. I remember it rained again in Hawaii, and I went outside again and watched the rainbow. I asked my dad why the rainbow didn't have the color of me in it. To this day I have never received an answer.

On September 10, 1993 I found out I was pregnant. I had an idea that I was pregnant, but I was not sure. I was happy and sad. I was happy because I had this life growing inside of my body, a life that I was going to love, cherish, nourish, and take care of. I was sad because I didn't want to disappoint my mother.

Sometimes I get scared because there are a lot of things I don't know. I try to always remember I have help. There are so many things I want for my child, so many things my child is going to have because of me.

I have changed a lot since I have been pregnant. I have stopped thinking just about my feelings and myself. I've learned to think about the way my child is

going to feel and the things my child is going to want.

DANIELE BELCHER

What I love is my son. Though he is not born yet, I feel a stronger bond with my son than I have ever felt in my life before. My son is my strength and my inspiration to succeed in every goal that I have.

I see many things when I think back to my childhood. I see picnics and trips to the beach, long vacations and rides on the swings. I see pretty dresses and Barbie dolls. I remember silly cartoons, sneaking candy before dinner, drawing hopscotch on the sidewalks and slumber parties.

ANDREA BLAHYJ

My daughter is the reason I push myself to do what I know I have to accomplish to make us have a good life. I want to be able to give my daughter what I had and what I didn't have.

Just
to see my daughter
smile
and be happy
is good
for me.

I like the way my daughter gets attitudes. She shows me she is angry if I let her cry a little bit. For the past four months I have watched the life God has enabled me to have. She gets bigger and bigger.

My daughter
is my inspiration.
She is
my heart.

LAKEISHA BLANDING

When I found out I was pregnant, I was devastated. I didn't know what to do. I was in the doctor's office with my head sagging. I was thinking about the

consequences I would have to face in the future. The doctor gave me an option. I could tell my mother myself or she would break the news. I decided it was best for me to tell my mom myself.

When my mother came into the room, she was smiling. When I broke the news to her, she was very disappointed. She was so upset that we did not talk for a whole day. I knew my body was not physically or mentally ready to deliver a baby, but I was not about to give it up no matter what. My family tried to make me feel bad, but all I thought to myself was not giving in no matter what.

LATOYRIA BRUMFIELD

When I am feeling sad, my child always does something to make me happy. She laughs and plays with me. She crawls and throws her bottle. My daughter makes me very happy. She makes me happy even though she spits up on me and hits me with her bottle. Her name is Shaquana Nevels. She is six months old. Shaquana is with my mother during the day. I miss her every time I leave.

When I was little, I liked to laugh and play. I was a happy child. I ran and jumped and played. My mother said I was a busybody because I moved around a lot. Being a child, to me, is being free and not having a care in the world.

I
can't be
a kid
anymore.

I have a child.
I have
responsibility
now.

The birth experience changed my life. I always wanted to know what it felt like, and now I do. It wasn't pleasant either. It was long and hard. I don't want to go through it again until I am about thirty. I, also, wanted to know how it felt to be a mother. It is not easy.

I respect my baby's father. I give him credit for taking care of his responsibility. We may not be together now, but it doesn't stop him from buying our baby the items she needs. My baby's father takes care of our baby, and he takes her to his house every weekend. When my child is older, I will tell her that her father

will always take care of her even though he is not with me anymore.

I think it is important for people to know that teenagers go through a lot when they give birth. There is a lot of responsibility. Giving birth though does not mean a young woman has to quit school or go on welfare. A young woman can have kids and be a successful parent if she puts her mind to it. When my daughter grows up and becomes a young woman, she will have a lot to tell her children.

FELICIA BUIE

I love my privacy. I love the sky. I love my family, the smell of dew, and my baby's father.

I remember my animals, especially my puppy. When I ran, he ran right along side of me. When tears rolled down my cheek, he licked my tears and allowed me to hug him. He was soft and cuddly with brown eyes and golden brownish beige fur. My puppy made me feel content and special. Pee Pee was more a friend than a pet.

I don't have anybody beside my family. There is only my family. Mainly the only person who I have is my mom. When I talk to my mom, my world fills with friends.

Many times at night
my mind
drifts
to the future, to the past, to the present.

I love to daydream. Daydreaming passes the time and makes me happy. Usually I seem to be depressed or lonely. In my life loneliness is frequent. There is one friend, Kim. She and I are very much alike. Kim is already a mom. She is a good one. She is talented and very funny. Kim, our babies, my family, that's my world.

GLENDA VASHELL CRAWFORD

I like eating watermelon on a hot summer's day. I like listening to R and B music to relax and unwind. I love my mom. She has done so much for me. I cherish life because I know tomorrow is not promised.

I like to be
loved,
respected,
cared for.

I like barbecues, picnics, and amusement parks. I like playing in a swimming pool. I love to shop and get new clothes.

When I was about nine or ten, I had a best friend, Shaunie. We did everything together. Shaunie was really sick, and often she was in the hospital. I visited her every time she was in the hospital, and she looked sicker and sadder. I had no idea how sick she really was. Shaunie was my best friend for ten years. I believed Shaunie wouldn't go anywhere. When we got older, we were going to get an apartment together. We were going to get married at the same time and our children were going to be best friends just like we were. One Saturday morning when I was all set to visit Shaunie it really happened. My best friend left me. This took a long time to get used to, but now I know Shaunie is in a better place, a place with no sadness, no pain.

I remember the day I found out I was pregnant like it was yesterday. I kind of figured I was, but I made an appointment to be sure. Sure enough I was pregnant, seven and a half weeks. My mind went blank. I could not speak. I could not move. The tears started to flow down my cheeks. I was terrified.

"Are you sure," I asked hoping she'd say she was just kidding. She didn't give me time to think about what I was going to do. She asked me a whole bunch of questions which I paid no attention to. I just stared out the window wondering what my mother would say and nodding every now and then. Then she asked me how my boyfriend was going to react. "Will he leave you or will he stand by your side?"

Being pregnant has made me think more about planning for the future. Mine will be a single parent family, me and my baby. My boyfriend was there in the beginning, and then he left. He came back again, and now he's gone. I don't know if the door will be open again when he wants to come back. Our relationship was like a merry go round. I got off, but he's still on. I won't go for another ride. I used to wonder why he played those games. Now I just don't care. I have my mother who loves me My mother will always be there for me.

Yes, I would like for my boyfriend to be a part of my life and my baby's life, but I know if I let him back in I'll be on that merry go round and this time I'll be taking my baby on with me. This is not what I want. I want a full time father

for my child, part time father just won't do. I don't want my child to experience the pain and hurt I have been through. I want my child to be happy. I want to be happy.

KATRINA DAVIS

I like to sit with my boyfriend and talk about our baby. We are both so curious and so amazed at all the changes occurring in my body.

I love
to lie down
and feel my baby
kick
and move.

At times I wonder what my baby is going to look like, but I know no matter what I'm still going to love my baby. Isn't it fascinating how a human being develops? I think we women have a special gift. We are able to produce life. I believe this is a gift from God.

I grew up in Brooklyn, New York. When I was seven, I lived in a drug house. I spent my days playing with my two brothers. I remember always saying, "Mommy, the door." People came to the house asking for drugs. We lived off D.S.S. We were an Hispanic family in Brooklyn, and we weren't very happy. We were barely making it. I lay down and rocked myself to sleep because the gunshots were so loud. The only thing that comforted me was my mother telling me, "Alright baby, mommy is here."

My grandmother stands out in my life. I love my grandmother so much. She was a wonderful person. I called her Abuela. I used to sit on the porch talking to her all day about everything. She teased me about my big green eyes. She knew I inherited my big green eyes from her. She was always telling me she loved me even though I was ugly, and then she would say, "You are the most beautiful girl God created." My grandmother loved Diet Pepsi. I loved her so much. She was a beautiful, loving person who meant the world to me.

Last June Abuela left for Puerto Rico. We kept in contact. I was supposed to go this summer. On December 20, my family received a phone call. My Abuela, Ramona Esquilin, died of a heart attack.

Now

I feel
alone,
like
something
is missing.

Now everything I accomplish, all my goals that I will reach, I will do for her.

Monroe County Executive Bob King wants abstinence. The president, and it seems all the high and mighty people today, talk about teen pregnancy in a bad way. They don't live where we live. They don't live in the city. These people have already made it in the world. Mostly everybody who is making the comments about teen pregnancy seems to be white.

Living in the city today is not easy. I'm not blaming getting pregnant on the city, but a lot of what we do has to do with our lives. A lot of our lives are difficult. We live around drugs and killings. It's rough here.

I don't think parents understand either. Parents try to ignore the fact that teens have sex. Parents need to talk, to communicate with their kids.

I think that the people who are commenting on teenage pregnancy should come to the city and see my everyday life.

JENNIFER DIAZ

I like people, pretty flowers, the color light blue. I like rap, slow music, and my baby. My baby is five months old.

My mind
is
free.

I cherish myself. I cherish my baby. There are things in this world you cannot hold on to.

I know
I can hold on to
myself
and my baby.

I remember my grandmother. My grandmother was the world to me. We used to laugh and talk when I felt like laughing and talking. I remember the day my grandmother told me she was going to New York City. She told me she would be right back and would take me back with her. I waited and waited, but my grandmother never came back. I knew something happened. I felt my trust, my love, my happiness, my joy all slip away into sadness. I couldn't stop, and I still can't stop. I knew something bad happened to her. It did. When I found out, I looked at the sky. I knew she was in heaven smiling at me. I smiled back.

When I found out I was pregnant, I couldn't believe it. My friend told me I was before I found out. I told my boyfriend I was. When the doctor told me he said, "Pearl Douglas I have great news for you." The doctor told me everything was going to be fine. I knew I wasn't ready for a baby, but I knew I loved the feeling of having a baby.

I told my mother I was pregnant. She was so happy. I knew I wanted a boy. My boyfriend wanted a boy, too. We have a son now, and I don't regret having him. I never will.

My birth experience was very scary. I didn't know pain and happiness could go together at the same time. One day I went to school just like I always did on any other day, but this day was different. I went to math class first period. I felt good, but as the class started I felt this pain as if a boxer was inside me fighting. I think I must have looked as if I was about to cry. My math teacher said, "Pearl are you alright. You look kind of angry." I couldn't speak. The pain was getting stronger. I was scared. I knew in a way it was time. I went to Miss White. She took me to the hospital. I was so frightened I cried. I couldn't stop crying.

The doctor came and checked to see if the baby was coming. When the doctor said, "Miss Douglas it's time," I felt my heart drop and my tongue go dry. I couldn't believe it. All the time of the labor all I did was cry. I felt happy and sad. When I saw my son, I was tired but not too tired to hold the most precious thing in the world to me. I was so very happy.

I am still with my baby's father. He is very important to our baby and to me. He spends quality time with our child. I love him for that. I know many boys don't care for their babies.

What I want society to know about me as a teenage mother is that my baby is a precious gift given to me, and I am not ashamed because I am sixteen and have

a son. My son is my joy and my happiness. I shouldn't be put down because I have a baby.

PEARL DOUGLAS

When I was five years old, I saw my brother running in the street chasing a cat. A truck was coming down the street. I guess the man driving the truck saw my brother and turned the other way. The truck came over the sidewalk and ran over my feet. They had to back the truck off my feet. Then they took me into the house and called the ambulance.

Whenever I wanted something, my grandmother always gave it to me. My grandmother was very nice looking, and she was a good person to know. She went to church every Sunday. She always asked me to come.

One day I was going over to a friend's house. My friend was not home so I went to the doctor to see if I was pregnant. The doctor called me, and told me I was pregnant. At first I didn't believe it. I took another pregnancy test. I was surprised. I was happy. I was scared to tell my mother. My cousin saw my pills in my room, and that's how my mother found out.

When my mother found out, she was surprised. She said she didn't believe it. She asked me who the baby's dad was. I told her. She told me she would like to meet him. She liked him. He is not with me any longer. We were together for one year and some months.

TAHBEE GRANT

When I was a child, I was happy. I was joyful. I had everything I wanted. I grew up in New York City. I went to the park, went swimming, and I went to amusement parks. I used to go to the top of the building with my uncle. We threw water balloons at people. These were the good days. I wish I was a child again.

When I was leaving Batavia to come to Rochester, my step mom told me I was pregnant. I didn't listen to her. When I got to Rochester, my boyfriend told me the same thing my step mom had said. I waited a couple of weeks, and then I went to the Jordan Health Center. I learned I was six weeks pregnant. I was happy. My baby is the best thing in the world to me. Every time I hold my baby I feel comfortable.

AISHA GRIFFIN

I was a shy, hyper little girl. I ran around a lot. I climbed trees and got dirty. I was never patient. I always had to have things done quickly. I knew the days went by too fast. My friends were just like me. I had lots of dolls and Barbies, but I never played with them. I liked playing kickball and swimming.

My Aunt Helen used to pick me up from my mother's house and take me to Victor to spend the weekend with her. We went to Friendly's for dinner, came home, and made cookies. Every time I went that's what we did, and before bed we watched a movie in the family room with my uncle. My aunt always served hot chocolate and brownies. I slept in the special bedroom they put together just for me.

In the morning Aunt Helen made eggs, bacon, and cinnamon toast for me. After breakfast we got dressed and went to the mall. My aunt always bought me a stuffed animal for my bedroom at my mom's house. I have five teddy bears and one stuffed cat.

When I went to get my physical for swimming tryouts, the doctor told me I was pregnant. I went home crying. I didn't know how to tell my mom. When I got home, I didn't say anything to my mom. I ran straight to my room. I sat by the phone trying to decide whether or not I should tell the father since we were no longer together. What would he say? What would he do? Would he want to be a part of the baby's life or would he not be concerned?

My baby's father wanted me to keep our baby. I am going to, but will he be there when I want to go out and I need him to watch the baby? Will he want to take the baby for a week? Why don't men stick to their promises? I talk to my baby's father every day and there are still questions we both need to answer. I do think he cares.

SARAH HEATH

I like Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa, Ice Cube, 2 Pac, Eazy E, Hammer, Lords of da Underground. Life matters to me.

My little daughter who is one year old is always on my mind. She's a special part of my life that I never had before. I am always on my feet meeting her every need. My daughter makes me happy; she makes me sad.

My grandmother is special to me. She's always there when I need her. She gives me warmth and love just by the touch of her hand.
My grandmother
took care
of me
when nobody
was there.

My grandmother is my mother and my father in my eyes. She is the older sister I never had. She taught me right from wrong and good from bad. My grandmother is my north star standing bright and high above all my misery.

TIESHA IVEY

I love the fact that I have the skills to be a nurse. I like the color blue. Blue is how I feel about myself. Blue is unclear, unsure. I like to listen to slow, soft music. It makes me feel good.

I want my child to have the best education. Material items don't matter. Someone once asked me whether I would rather be good looking or educated.

LATASHA JACKSON

When I was around six years old, I liked climbing trees and playing games like hide and go seek. I liked to jump rope.

My grandmother is always on my mind. She has asthma, and she smokes cigarettes. I worry about her. I worry about her dying or having a heart attack. Every time I think about her I say this poem in my head.

As days go by
I'm not getting any younger,
As days go by
I'm getting older and older,
Until one day I'll have to die
And all those days done
Have gone by.

JACKIE JOHNSON

I like my boyfriend. He is tall, dark, and sexy. I like my six month old son. He is so little and so precious. I like the way he smiles and learns things. I like the color purple. I am seventeen years old, and all my life I have admired no one. I was raised by my mother because my father didn't want to help. I grew up by myself and played by myself. My mother never let me go anywhere. I had to stay in the house.

My mother is nice and sweet, but when she has a problem with someone she likes to get even. She never solves the problem. I don't agree with that attitude. Me, I just ignore things. I used to admire my aunt. She is real pretty with long hair, and she can sing. She is smart, but now her life is going in the wrong direction. I will never understand why people who are nice and smart take drugs. My father wants to enter my life. Why, he never wanted me born? He is nobody to me.

My boyfriend and my son are so special to me. My son looks just like my boyfriend. When I look at my son, I see my boyfriend. My boyfriend has been with me for three years. We had our first baby when I was fifteen years old. I, also, had a miscarriage. It hurt me so badly. I was so sad. When I became pregnant the second time, I was scared I was going to lose my baby again. I still think about the baby I lost, what it would have been, what it would have looked like. My boyfriend wanted a son, and he has one. He spoils his son so much. We have been engaged for five months now.

This birth experience was exciting and somewhat scary. It was, also, painful. Sunday, August 29, 1993 I was sitting home. It was my due date, and I was waiting to go into labor. My mom was home with me. My boyfriend was at work. My boyfriend took half a day to be with me just in case. I lied about my contractions just to go to the hospital.

When I arrived at the hospital, I was scared and nervous. The nurses told me to walk for two hours and if no progress I could leave. I walked. My mucous plug ran down my leg, and they then decided to break my water. That's when I really got scared. My labor had started, and I couldn't stop it. My boyfriend didn't want to leave my side, but I could tell my anger and harsh words were hurting him. He left to go into the hall and let out some tears. When he returned I felt so bad. I asked him to come hold me. He smiled and came.

I slept for awhile, but I was in pain. My boyfriend tried to keep me calm, but I went out of control. I wasn't getting enough oxygen, so I had to wear an oxygen mask. My baby's heart beat went down. I panicked more. When I pushed, it felt good. When my baby came out, I felt even better. My boyfriend cut the

cord. He held our baby and gave him to me. He kept saying, "I got a family. I got a family." I felt like a real woman. I gave birth to a child.

TANESHA JOHNSON

In all the world I love my little boy. He is small, and I like the way he looks.

When I was four and five, my mom used to wash my hair. We used to have fun. I was spoiled. We had fun until my sister came.

One day I came home and went to bed. When my mother came home, she asked me when my last menstrual period was. I told her I did not know. She said I was pregnant. I didn't think so, but my mother took me to the doctor, and the doctor said I was pregnant. My mother was hurt. I was sad, but I told my mother I was keeping the baby. I was scared. I was confused. I wondered what people were saying. I wanted to keep my baby.

On November 13 I was in labor. The pain woke me up. At first it felt like a menstrual cramp, then it got harder until I felt like going to the bathroom. I went downstairs and told my mother. She was so tired she went back to sleep. I got so angry with her because she didn't get up and see about me. I went back upstairs. My mother finally got up and came upstairs to my bedroom. She began timing my labor pains. She called the doctor to tell her how far apart the contractions were. The doctor told us to come to the hospital.

My sister-in-law drove me to the hospital. When we got there, they rushed me to the delivery room. They broke my water bag and put my feet in the stirrups to deliver. My baby's head began showing. I kept pushing until all of his body was out. Even though the pain was tough to deal with, I was thrilled when I saw my baby son.

My baby's father is a sweetheart, but sometimes he makes me angry. He does for my baby though. He buys my baby clothes and a lot of stuff.

LASHANDA LOVE

I like to sit on my bedroom floor with the window open and imagine how my baby will look. I like to imagine how my baby will call me mommy and call my fiance, daddy.

I enjoy
letting the wind
blow
through my head.
I like to walk around
and imagine
how much better
things could be
in this world.

I like to have interesting conversations with my mother and my fiance. I like to feel free and comfortable to do anything I want to do.

My mother, my two brothers and I lived next door to my grandmother. It was so great. We spent summer days in my grandmother's backyard playing and eating cherry popsicles. We always had good times. We barbecued. We sat around in lawn chairs. We talked and laughed. I miss my grandmother a lot. As I got older, I grew more and more apart from being in her backyard. My grandmother is in Florida now, and I miss her dearly.

LETICIA MARQUEZ

All I remember about being four was how my father would come over and would always ask for money.

My mother knew. My mother knew I was pregnant. I went to the doctor to find out if she was right. They told me I was four months pregnant. I was happy. I knew someone was going to be a part of me.

I am still with my baby's father.

ANDREA MAYES

There is only one person in my life who means so much to me. It is my mother. My mother raised me after my father left. I know my mother loves me a lot even though she doesn't say it. I love her so much. The bond I have with my mother is so strong no one can break it.

There is
no one else

I cry for.

I found out I was pregnant from my boyfriend's mother. I didn't believe her when she told me so I went to the doctor to have a pregnancy test. I wanted to prove her wrong. She was right. I was pregnant. I was so happy. I never thought I could get pregnant. I always thought if I got pregnant I would not have an abortion or give my baby away. I wanted to raise my baby the way I feel he/she should be raised.

You don't know me, and I don't know you.
My face is only a face in a crowd.
My feelings stay my feelings.
My face shows anger, am I angry
or am I hiding my feelings?
If you really knew me, you would like me,
but since nobody knows me
I am only a face in a crowd.

KATHERINE CAREY MEDINA

I love and cherish my son, Raheem. He was life that grew inside of me for nine months. When I gave birth, I felt the joy of knowing a child brought into the world. I love Raheem's smile, and when he cries it sounds like he says, "Ma." He is two months old.

I always thought of myself as a young woman even though people told me I was a child. One day though my childhood turned. On that day I went to the hospital and found out I was pregnant. I went to the hospital for pains in my side. They asked me to take tests for something else, and I found out I was a mother to be. Was I ready to be a mother? Am I ready to be a mother? Sometimes I still wonder. Am I a good mother?

My baby's father was nice. He treated me well. His first baby's mother died, and I think he is scared to lose another. I think this is why he doesn't come around.

When my son was first born, I vowed to take care of him and raise him the best way I could to the best of my ability. My son will learn how to treat women with respect.

CORINNE MOSLEY

I love my kids. They are special to me. They are always in my heart. I like music to soothe my troubles.

My grandmother spoiled me. My mother was her first born, and she died at an early age. My grandmother saw my mother in my eyes. My grandmother was sweet and talkative. She was a heart warming woman and a good cook. I miss sleeping beside her. I always used to laugh when she snored so loud. I copied her. My grandmother did my hair. She thought she did a wonderful job. She loved to do my hair. I will always remember waking up in the morning. I would say, "Good morning Mom." She would say, "Child your breath smells like garlic. Get out of my face." I miss helping my grandmother bake her homemade sweet potato pie and her pancakes with raisins in them.

When I think of her
I cry
joyness
to have had
a grandmother
like her.

I wish my grandmother was here now to share my special pride and joy in my own children. She would spoil them like she did me.

I love you Mom.

I miss being a kid, miss playing with my friends. I miss playing hide and seek and freeze tag and house. I guess I went from being play mother to real mother. My childhood though will always be in my mind.

Being pregnant really changed my entire life totally. I knew being pregnant I had to take care of myself, and I couldn't do the things I used to do. Being pregnant was like an experiment for me and giving birth to a child is also an experiment. When you are pregnant you get to sleep and eat, but when the baby comes, it's all over. Your fun is gone. You have a life to take care of first and boys and going out partying isn't raising your child. You can go out once in awhile.

I have two kids, and it's really difficult. One kid is difficult, but two is extraordinary. My two year old daughter is going through her terrible twos, and

boy is it aggravating. I have to be patient. Being a mother is enjoyable, also. I have two people who love me and not because I'm supposed to be a person to just take care them. My children love me because I am a loving mother and their best friend. I pray to God everyday to give me the strength and courage and wisdom to take care of my children mentally and physically. I love them with all my life and my soul.

My advice to a young teenager who is having unprotected sex is if you want to get laid, one of these days you'll have AIDS. I would also advise that teenager that if you want to have a baby don't have a child because babies are cute and cuddly and sweet. Babies take money. Love does not put clothes on a baby's back or food on the table, but as 2 Pac says, "Keep your head up."

AISHA MURRAY

March 30, 1993. I remember this day like it was yesterday. This is the date I found out I was pregnant. It all started when I took an early pregnancy test at home. As I sat and waited for the results to show up, I remember my hands trembled. I stared at the ceiling. I did not want to look down to see what the results were. I finally got enough positive courage to look. The results were positive.

I closed my eyes. I remember the tears that ran my face. It was Tuesday, and my boyfriend was at night school. I waited for him to call. When I told him the news, I could tell he was scared. We both were. We were both confused, but at the same time we were happy.

We moved in together. I have a wonderful baby girl, and my boyfriend and I are getting married on July 24, 1994. Thank you God for giving my boyfriend and my daughter, Kyreese, to me.

MARIA NAZARIO

I remember when my grandmother passed. It was near Christmas. We were all waiting for my grandmother to come. A police officer came instead. He told us my grandmother had died of a stroke. We were all miserable.

My grandmother is gone, but I can still feel her presence. I can still feel her smile. Sometimes I can smell her perfume as if she was standing right beside me.

One night I was lying in my bed, and all of a sudden my rocking chair started rocking. I saw a lady all dressed in white. I knew it was my grandmother coming to see me for the last time.

CASSANDRA ORR

What do I like?
I like
the sounds of powerful black voices
uniting
together.

I like to walk down the street
and
feel free.
I like
to escape,
to let my emotions
run wild.

I am not crazy. I am imaginative.

I cherish the good memories of my childhood. I cherish every moment I have spent with my child. I savor every smile, every babble, every coo that comes from her mouth.

When I look around today, I see sad, depressed, confused people. I see the people of my race struggle to survive after years of oppression. They still don't make whose grade? I see us heading for another genocide.

It is
the little things
that bring me joy,
the smile of my daughter,
the look
in the eyes of my boyfriend
when he looks
at me.
I wake up everyday alive.

I remember. Oh yes, oh yes I remember. I remember roaming fields while the

breeze made love to my face. I strolled beaches. My bare feet kissed the sand. I remember, I remember the sun, the sun on my body as I sat on Granny's lap. I remember.

On September 30, 1990 Mama told me to pack my bags and buy my ticket. "You are moving to Rochester, New York," she said. I screamed.

Pain
is a parasite.

Jenolee is slim, short, sophisticated, and very demanding. We are complete opposites. She is my very best friend. Jenolee had big dreams. She made them all come true. I had big dreams, too, but at this moment mine are slightly deferred. Jenolee never gave up on me. Jenolee is smart and not very talkative. All the boys seem to fall at her feet. She has no kids. She is in college.

I have
a daughter.
I
am struggling
to finish high school.

Jenolee never once made me feel ashamed. She never once made me feel like I didn't belong.

Is he a figment of my imagination, or is he real? Dark, handsome, and oh so mysterious, his eyes tell romantic stories. His heart is big and gentle and pure. His shoulder is my resting place. He is my world.

Was it a romantic night, or was it just one of those nights. I don't know when it happened. I remember it was March first and very cold. I remember being blissfully happy. It was 6:00 p.m., and I was in a small room. The smell and the atmosphere were teen pregnancy. Everyone looked timid. We clutched to chairs like drowning rats.

"Miss Phillips, Miss Phillips, please step in room number four." Shaking, I walked slowly to the room. "Well young lady you are really pregnant, eight and a half weeks. You are so young and so beautiful, what are you going to do?"

I looked at her like she was stupid. I acted like I was stupid. I read between "You are so young beautiful, what are you going to do?" I knew exactly what

she was saying. I knew exactly what I wanted to do. Thank God, I was pregnant. I felt an overwhelming urge of joy. I was going to have a family I could call my own. There would be someone to love, someone to understand, someone to care for and to be there for.

My boyfriend already knew. He held me. I felt anew, but most of all we both felt loved. We both filled our gaps.

Does anyone want to listen? Does anyone want to hear? Does anyone want to understand the teenage mother? When we are pregnant, we are ridiculed. They say we are stupid. They say we are naive. They turn their backs on us. Does it matter what we think? We are human beings. We feel responsible. We feel pain. We feel sadness. Yes, we feel embarrassment.

We want to feel equal. We want to feel loved. We want to be loved. We want to feel like human beings, and most of all we want to feel like someone who is trying.

GRACE PHILLIPS

I like movies, music, clothes, and money. I love to keep money in my pocket. I, also, love to spend it. I love to listen to music. I listen to music when I'm bored, sad, or happy.

Music
sometimes
puts me to sleep.

I play music
all night
so I can stay
relaxed.

I like to watch movies about blacks. I love love scenes. I love funny movies. I love to go shopping, too. I like getting things. Most of the time my mother buys and I do the picking. My mom is like a sister to me.

I want to become a lawyer. I want to complete my dream. I will cherish my child. I want to make sure my child has everything she/he needs. I want to spoil my child like my parents do me.

When I was about six years old, my father used to buy candy and bubble gum for my brother and me. He used to spoil us. One day he took us to the toy store and told us to pick out anything we wanted. Guess what we picked out, a jump rope and bubbles. That's all we picked out a jump rope and bubbles. I had a nice childhood. My parents always provided for us. I can't remember ever hearing them say no, no you can't have that. I want my baby to have a childhood like mine.

I am six months pregnant. My baby is due July twenty first. When I first found out I was pregnant, I was three months. I figured I was, but I just kept putting it past me. I went with my friend and my cousin to get a check up. They convinced me to find out. When the doctor came back with the results, she told me I was pregnant. I figured that so I wasn't shocked, but the thought of me having a baby was a shock.

I am happy to have a child of my own. I will be having a baby boy. I am still with my baby's father. Our relationship is good. I want to give my child the best childhood he can have.

I am a teenager who is pregnant. I found out I was pregnant when I was three months. I decided to keep my baby because I wanted someone to spoil. I believe to have a child you must be financially ready, and be ready mentally and physically. Money is not a problem for me. I know having this child is going to change my life in many good ways.

My advice to a young teen who is pregnant is before you decide to have your baby, make sure you can make it. You need to try to succeed in the world. Don't have a child just to say you have one. Make sure you can provide for the baby.

My advice to girls today is don't have unprotected sex. Use safe sex. If you chose not to have six, that's great. Don't have a baby to make the father stay with you. If you decide to have a baby, pregnancy is hard, especially when you are young.

KAYAMA PHIPPS

I love and care about my family. When I was five year old I lived in Maryland with my mother and father and sisters and brother. One day when I got up my stomach felt funny. It hurt me to walk. It hurt me to eat. It hurt really bad.

When I went to the doctor, they kept me. The next day my appendix was out. My mother came and visited me every day until I was out.
I found out I was pregnant when I was eight and a half weeks. I went to my school and took a pregnancy test. The test said yes. When I got home, my friend had me take a pregnancy test, too. My friend was happy, and my baby's father was, too. He told me not to let my mother talk me into not having the baby. I was really happy. All my friends in school knew before I left.

I buy things for my baby. I think about when he/she will be born. I think about a name. I think about how he/she will look. I am going to be a mother.

MARIA PIZARRO

I was at Jordan Health Center with my friend when I found out I was pregnant. I went to the Jordan Health Center for that purpose. I was suspicious. My boyfriend left us there and went to pick up his friend. The doctor walked in and told me in Spanish, "*Estas embarazada*." I looked at him. I didn't know what to do.

I never let my mother know until I was almost six months. All I wanted to do was get my boyfriend accepted by them. After a couple of months they thought of him like, well it's only temporary, it's not like she is going to have his kids. If they only knew.

I prayed my baby would be a boy. I didn't want a girl. I wanted a boy because boys can protect themselves better than girls. Girls are helpless in some situations, and I never want those types of things to happen to my children. It's horrible. I hope my son is protected by God. I pray every night.

My boyfriend has been with me through these months of my pregnancy. He is anxious for me to have the baby. He will be a good father and a proud one.

This will not delay my goals to be a nurse, but it will be difficult. The baby is a miracle that was meant to happen but was not planned.

Pregnancy has changed my life and made me responsible. I used to go out a lot. I went to parties and clubs. Now I can't go. Everyone is scared someone will bump into me, and I will get hurt. I listen because nobody is worth the loss of my baby. I know life is no party game anymore. I not only have to think of me now, I have to think of my unborn baby. I have to think about my future goals

to make both of our lives better. Sometimes I think if only this happened later in my life, but everything in life has its purpose.
Many people say maybe she will grow up now. I have. I am happy this happened. My pregnancy has made me determined to go through with my goals.

I have a relative who is a very jealous person. She kept advising me, before I told my mother, to get an abortion. She told me I was too young. She told me she sometimes regrets having her baby because she has limitations now. That's not true. She never took care of her baby. Her grandmother and her mother did. She did whatever she wanted to do because there was always someone to take care of her and the baby. I think she told me what she did because she want no attention taken away from her baby and she thinks my son will do this.

LYDIA SALGADO

When I was a child, I dreamed about being a singer or a dancer, and sometimes I dreamed about being a writer. I dreamed of being a singer because when I was small my mother used to tell me that I loved to sing. She didn't know what I was singing, but she knew I liked to sing. She, also, told me I loved to dance to any kind of music. Once I was dancing somewhere, somewhere my mother told me not to but I didn't listen, and I tripped over my shoe and fell and hit my head on the floor. I had a big lump. Since then I haven't danced.

My mother told me I loved to write. I wrote on my mother's things, things I wasn't supposed to write on, but I didn't get in trouble. The first word I wrote was Mama.

My sister and I are very close. I tell her my secrets and she tells me her secrets. We talk about our problems. My sister can hold it in. If I can't tell my sister my problems, I hold them in and then I get very upset. I like talking to my sister.

My sister
knows
how
I feel.

My sister is there for me when I need her. I will be there for her until I die.

I am the youngest one in my family. The thing that gets me mad is that I am

not spoiled. The one who is spoiled in my family is the third oldest. I get mad at my mom for not spoiling me. I know that is stupid.
I can't wait until I have my baby. I can talk to my baby when my sister is not around. I know that babies don't talk, but I will feel much better. My son is not going to be spoiled by me, but he is going to be spoiled by his father. Why? He will be his father's first son. His father always wanted a son.

All I wish for my baby is to have a better life than I did.

JUANA SANTANA

I love my son Quamell with all my heart. I like the way he smiles at me when I tell him how much I love him. I like the way he looks at me with his pretty light brown eyes. There is no one else I love more than Quamell.

My baby's father is very loving and caring towards our baby. He likes being with him and taking him places. I am glad he is there for me and our baby.

TWANDA SCOTT

I like that I am able to have a baby and know that my baby will be taken care of by me or my parents.

My
favorite color
is
purple.

I will cherish my baby. I will never give up my baby. I know my baby will be someone who will admire me. My life will make my baby's life better.

When I was a child, I was a tomboy. I played football, baseball, kickball, jumping fences, and climbing trees. I will always remember my mom saying, "April, stop playing with them hard headed boys and go play with them girls." My mother speaks with a southern accent, especially when she used to yell down that street. She thought I had no business down there. As I got older, I started getting the tomboy out. I started dressing more like a girl and acting more mature.

It was a bright and sunny day the day I found out I was pregnant. I had to go

get a physical for cheerleading, so I went to Jordan Health Center. I had everything checked out. I was fine, but before I left the doctor called me back and told me I was pregnant. Boy you should have seen the look on my face.

I left Jordan laughing to myself, saying to myself, "I'm going to be a mommy." I don't know what I felt or how I felt. It was like a big Great Dane just came and attacked me without me knowing. Now I feel good about having a gift this precious as part of my life. I know I will never say I made a mistake. When I lay down without protection, I knew the consequences.

I want to tell the many teenage girls who are sexually active don't let anyone pressure you into doing what you don't want to do. It's not right. If you are having unprotected sex and you end up pregnant, should you blame the father? Should you blame the baby? That child did not ask to be brought into the world.

APRIL SHEPHARD

I remember when I used to love playing with my cousin. Everyday we would go to this big hill in back of the projects that we lived in. We went to this hill with his bike and my roller skates. We had the time of our lives until it got dark.

We
grew up.
We grew
apart.

I still see us playing and having fun. That time will remain forever with me.

When I found out I was pregnant, I really wasn't sad. I was kind of happy. Although some people think being pregnant young is something bad, I think being pregnant is a gift. To me pregnancy has brought joy and happiness. I can't wait until I have my baby. Pregnancy didn't change me except that I can't do as much as I used to do. This doesn't bother me.

I love my baby's father. He's with me everyday. He's by my side. He understands when I am having a bad day. He works so he can help support our baby. He wants to be with me every step of the way. We both can't wait until I have the baby. I know raising a baby can be hard, but together I think we can do it. I really think we will be good parents. I feel happy that he wants to help

me and take care of our baby. I think I am lucky. So many girls get pregnant, and the father doesn't want to help.

JANETTA SEIGLER

When I first knew I was pregnant, I cried. I was scared. I was scared to get the pregnancy test. When they told me the test was positive, I was in shock. My cousin told my mother for me. It seems like I've changed a lot. I'm happy now.

I think my baby's father should take care of his baby. He should buy clothes, diapers, and milk. I think he should stop running the streets. I want him to be happy for me and to spend more time with me and the baby.

SHANELLA SMITH

I can't wait to see my baby. Will she be beautiful? Will she just turn out to look like me? I know she will be small and tender. I can't wait to hold her and teach her how to laugh.

One day I was a child joyously laughing and playing freeze tag and hide-and-go-seek. One day I was a child with no burdens and nothing to hurt for.

I loved
to turn,
I loved
to learn.

I
was a child.

I loved to sing the itty, bitty songs. Now I know I won't be singing the itty, bitty songs to myself. Now I know I will be singing the itty, bitty songs to put my baby to sleep.

Out came the rain
And shook the spider out.

LILY SOSA

I love my son. I like poetry. I like music. I like laughter. I like the way my son eats everything. I like rap. I like R and B. I like soul. I like gospel. I love my boyfriend. I love my mother. I like flowers. I like the way they bloom.

All that I remember from my childhood is all the different places I have lived. We moved just about all my life. I loved my aunt. My aunt was a great woman. She was always happy. I was with her for about a year. All of a sudden she was gone. She was taken from me. Why? Why? Why?

When I found out about my aunt, I cried. I cried all the time. I vowed if I have a girl I will name her Donna Marie Stewart. I loved my aunt. I hope she is happy where she is.

BETHANY STEWART

I grew up fast. I had no childhood. When I was ten, I learned to cook, sew, and clean. I cleaned and cooked and kept my brothers and sisters well dressed. My mother had two jobs. She had no time for her kids. I was the oldest. I took my mother's responsibilities and made them my own.

I want my daughter
to have
a childhood.
I want
my daughter
to play
everyday
and not worry
about taking care
or her sisters and brothers.

KATHERINE STINSON

I love writing. I cherish every moment of my life. I care about the baby I am going to have. I love writing. I love expressing my feelings.

When I was five, I remember running up to the ice cream truck and buying an ice cream cone. I, also, remember wrestling with my brothers and eating watermelon and letting the juice drip down my legs.

PRISCILLA STOCK

I like to sleep in on rainy days and let time pass away. I like to spend quality time with my boyfriend and my baby. I like to go out and eat until I can eat no longer. I like to shop. I like to talk to my mom on the phone even though we live down the street from one another. I like to kid with my sisters. Plain and simple, I like attention.

On the run. On the run. On the run. We had no place to call home. We didn't have our own bedrooms. All we had was a couch bed at my Aunt Martha's house. We weren't running away from an alien or some crazed killer. We were on the run from my junkie father who had stolen everything we owned and sold it for his habit. I was eleven. My sister, Courtney, was five. My youngest sister, Ashley, was one. We had had a beautiful four bedroom, two bathroom, double staircase house, but due to things beyond our control and beyond our father's control, we had to run away from him. Every night my mom had to sleep with her purse. The house was like Fort Knox, but he still found a way in. The police didn't help us. We were all alone.

We have managed through the years. Presently my father is incarcerated, and my mother is building her life back up. My mother is plastering the holes in her life. I am building my own home, my own family, my life. I no longer run.

That day is as clear in my memory as the sky on a sunny spring day. I was walking down Thurston Road. The day was gloomy; the sky gray. Greg and I tried to act normal, but it wasn't working. When we walked into the door of Planned Parenthood, the butterflies in my stomach were flying as if they were off in a field somewhere. Greg was as nervous as I was.

After going through the humiliation of my first exam, they told me the results. I indeed was eight weeks pregnant. Greg and I racked our brains on what to do. It wasn't easy. We cried together, and we lied together to hide our secret. I was so scared. I never felt so scared in my life. My mom found out two days later after Greg and I made an attempt to run away to Buffalo where Greg was originally from. We had everything planned out, but my suitcase gave me away as I was walking out of the house.

Pregnancy changed me dramatically. Besides the changes in my body, I think a lot about the future. I never used to do that. I think a lot more about responsibility. My feelings about the world have changed. I became more aware of the violence, the environment, and everyone around me. My daughter is my

reminder now. Every time I wake up in the morning my daughter reminds me of what I went through to keep her healthy and bring her into this world. She reminds me of all the temptations I overcame. My daughter has brightened my life. She has given my life more color, and the colors are vivid.

MICHELLE TAGGERT

I like my boyfriend. I like his smile. I like his sensitivity. I like the way he touches me. He is loving. He is caring. I like the fact that my boyfriend has been with me through my whole pregnancy. I like the fact that we are going to bring a baby into this world and try to make a difference in our baby's life.

Once when I was a child, my mother's friend was in the hospital. I was very ill and so was my mother's friend. My mother's friend's last request was to see my mother, but because I was so ill with pneumonia my mother could not leave me and fulfill her friend's last request. My mother's friend passed away that same day she made her last request. I was hurt. I was ashamed. My mother could not be there for her friend. It took me a long time to adjust to that feeling, my mother could not fulfill her friend's last request.

LISA TORRES

I like to play with my baby, that's what I like to do. I cherish my little girl, Rasheeda who is one year old. I love her so much.

She has the
biggest eyes
you have
ever seen.

Rasheeda is so black, the color is so nice, just like I always wanted. She has the softest hair in the world. I like to play with her hair and wash her hair.

PASSIAN USHER

I don't have anybody because when I was small my family wasn't there for me. Only my grandmother was there for me. Each night I felt so alone. Each night I feel so alone. I have no one to care for but my son. My son means the world to me. Sometimes I feel I don't know how to love him. When I was growing up, I

was hurt and left. I'm afraid my son might stop loving me like my real parents did.

I don't have any friends, but there is a girl I can talk to about how I feel. My father is supposed to be dead. My mother doesn't want me. I hate her sometimes. Why did she do what she did to me?

I wish I knew how to love, but I don't. I cry every night thinking about how it would feel to have a real family, not half of one. I cry because sometimes I feel I can't bring my son up right. There is not a father there for him. I'm going to try my hardest to do right for him. I will never do what my parents did to me.

My baby's father first told me I was pregnant. He kept telling me, but I didn't believe him. One day I bought a beer and then went home and ate chili. My stomach hurt really badly, and my stomach had been getting bigger, too. That same day I went to the doctor, and that's when I found out I was pregnant. I was in shock.

INEZ WILLIAMS

The doctor told me in his office. He said, "The pregnancy test is positive." My mother and I cried in the waiting room. Then the nurse told us that the test was positive and true. I was sad and nervous. I was going to be a mother.

I heard from my friend that my baby's father is not going to be with me any longer because the baby is going to be born. We don't have a relationship anymore.

How am I going to take care of my baby and myself and keep going to high school and graduate from high school and get a nice job and earn money so my child will go to school in the future? I want my child to have a nice house to live in. I want to pay my bills. I want to have a good life in the future.

ALISHIA WRIGHT